

Missionary Christianity - A Muslim Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Let there be no misunderstanding of our intentions. This booklet is not an assault on Christianity. Instead, we intend to clarify vagueness, supply neglected information, and finish incomplete thoughts found in the usual presentation of the Christian missionary. The Qur'an encourages the discussion of religious matters but according to a vital principle: both sides are supposed to discuss truth. (Qur'an 3:61). Where the missionary has left matters vague or has hidden some information, or has not finished a thought the truth has not been presented.

Since our goal is a careful analysis, let the reader consider his own response carefully. Any disagreement must be specified as a disagreement with something actually stated in the following material. It must also be said that nothing written here can be applied to all Christians. Christian belief covers a wide range. We are concerned with the style described in the first paragraph.

CHRISTIAN OBJECTIONS

Consider first some common Christian objections to Islam. The Christian points to corruption and bad behavior in so-called Muslim lands; he cites the warfare Muhammad waged; he denounces polygamy. In response, it must be said that bad Muslims condemn Islam only if bad Christians condemn Christianity; warfare disqualifies Muhammad as God's spokesman only if it also disqualifies Joshua; polygamy condemns Islam only if it condemns Christianity. (It is Christian culture, not the Christian religion, which has prohibited polygamy. In the Bible Paul has recommended monogamy for bishops and Jesus has spoken of the sanctity of the union but no Bible verse prohibits the practice.)

Most Christian objections are of this nature. They are the same kind of charges that national groups or political parties might make against each other. They are built on those things which one person dislikes about another person. The attacker does not ask the other man to justify his position. He simply announces his disgust. By contrast, a Muslim is concerned that the Christian should justify his position.

MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

Christians say that God is "immutable", i.e. unchanging. How then can it be said that He passed through the state of death? How could He grow in knowledge? (Luke 2:52). When we forgive a debt it means that we expect no payment. "The Lord's Prayer" asks God to forgive our debts the way we forgive our debtors. Why then does Jesus' have to pay a price for our sins? The usual answers: The many paradoxes of a God-man, a being simultaneously mortal and immortal are said to be resolved by the phrase "with God all things are possible." The "debt of sin" is explained as a misunderstood term so that the crucifixion was not so much a payment as a necessary demonstration of God's justice.

BASIC POINT

As will be shown, these responses illustrate the Christian difficulty: while he seems to respond to every question, there is no way to form an explanation consistent with all those things he has said. Instead, the total of the answers is a contradictory system. This fact is itself incorporated into the total. That is, where a logical investigation finds a conflict, this is covered over by insisting that the love of God is more important, doubt is a dangerous tendency, and these difficulties are "divine mysteries" If a person is satisfied with this kind of rationale, no logical presentation is likely to change his mind. However, for those who would be motivated by exposure to facts, this booklet describes the situation in brief. If the Christian feels that a logical discussion is more than we should expect when considering religious matters, let him be encouraged by the Biblical passage at Isaiah 1:16: ". . . come let us reason together."

DEMONSTRATING THE POINT

Now consider the responses, the second then the first. The missionary is most concerned that the non-Christian "take advantage" of the "ransom sacrifice" of Jesus - otherwise a man is "lost". But this urgency is based on a price being paid. If we acknowledge that God is just, we do not need a demonstration of His justice. But the Christian insists that we must acknowledge the crucifixion itself, not God's justice, or be lost. Despite his answer, we are required to acknowledge a debt as paid not forgiven. Even though the phrase "with God all things are possible" are from the words of Jesus in the Bible, this proposition actually turns against Christian belief. It is self-destructive because it says that God can do "un-Godly" things (act foolishly for example). It demolishes arguments where it is used. For example:

Christian: "The true nature of God is a Trinity."

Muslim: "How can $1+1+1=1$?"

Christian: "With God all things are possible."

Muslim: "Then the Trinity is not His nature, how He must be. It is an option. He could have been 3, 5, 9 or whatever."

THE PATTERN

These are two examples of the difficulties which we promised to expose. In general the pattern is this: A question is asked and an answer is given. But the answer conflicts with another article of faith or practice. So, in fact, the original question is not really answered because the response has not come from Christian belief. Instead it has come from something in conflict with Christian teaching.

EXPLANATION VERSUS PROOF

There is a more basic issue than all that has been discussed so far. If we are only concerned with the analysis of explanations, we have skipped a point. The fact is, explanation is not proof. Ask a man why he believes something and he will usually respond by explaining his belief - not why it must be true. Whatever a missionary explains to a Muslim, our first question is really: "Where did you get your explanations?" On this matter, the missionary almost always holds a minority view among Christians. The majority of Christians believe the same as Muslims regarding the Bible.

THE STATUS OF THE BIBLE

We believe that the Bible contains the words of God and other material besides. The "fundamentalist" Christian insists that: all of the Bible comes from God, without error, at least in the "original manuscripts". So the Muslim does not attack "God's Word". Rather, he rejects attributing the status of "God's Word" to writings which do not qualify. In recent years the missionary has sometimes tried to fool the Muslim on this point. The Qur'an talks about "the Book" of the Christian and Jews. The missionary has told us that this Book is the Bible.

AN IMPORTANT QUR'ANIC VERSE ON THE SUBJECT

In fact, the Qur'an refers to the authentic scriptures and the forgeries in their possession (See Qur'an 3:77). At least one Qur'anic verse has been misquoted in missionary literature. By quoting the first half of Qur'an 5:48 they hope to convince Muslims that we must accept the total Bible. The verse in its entirety refers to the Qur'an as a confirmation of previous scriptures and a control. The word translated control is used to describe quality control in normal Arabic. This involves rejection of the disqualified. The Qur'an is called the criterion for judging the false in other scriptures (Qur'an 3:3). Another verse which is complimentary to those that charge forgery is, the verse which explains that the Qur'an will make clear much of that which Christians have concealed or passed over (Qur'an 5:15).

BIBLE MIRACLES?

Some attempts have been made to prove the divine origin of the Bible. These fall into two categories: an appeal to accuracy and an appeal to miracles. In the first case we are given a number of historical or scientific points mentioned in Bible verses. What is left vague is why accurate statements should imply the work of God. The Bible makes contact with reality, but so do works of fiction. In fact, a man has to tell us some truth before he can lie to us. We do not mean to label the Bible as totally fictitious, but only to point out the weakness of an argument for divine origin of the Bible which is based on assorted accurate statements made in Bible verses. There are attempts made to dazzle us into belief by those who cite miracles

performed by the Bible! For example, Ivan Panin spent 50 years writing over 43,000 pages investigating Bible numerics. There are however, basic flaws in such an approach. First, Panin builds schemes around the numbers seven and eleven, and he the position value of letters and other devices. But the Bible does not state that these things have any relevance. Nowhere has God said: "Behold the miracle of seven and eleven!" Second, "numerical miracles" are cited especially in regard to their the Bible "perfectly preserved" accuracy. Yet the Bible also contains numerical inconsistencies. Various statistics in the Biblical books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are in conflict and this is excused as being only minor details which were lost over the years. Preservation of numbers is praised while the lack of preservation is excused. Third, the "discoveries" of these researchers tend to be self-reinforcing. For example, Panin himself revised the New Testament based on his ideas. Where some text is faulty or doubtful, he decides on the basis of that which fits his scheme. One author of "theomatics" maintained that the anonymous book of Hebrews was written by Paul because this would mean the total number of books in the Bible credited to Paul would then be equal to fourteen - a multiple of seven.

And there is the "miracle" of personal experience: "The Bible is true because it changed my life." Of course, any piece of literature is supposed to change the life of a thoughtful reader. To be fair, believers in the dazzling sort of miracle are less common than those who appeal on grounds resembling personal experience. In any case the "miracles" are unrelated to the conclusion that they are supposed to establish - the divine origin of the entire Bible. Meanwhile, the appeal to accuracy is also an insufficient premise to establish this conclusion.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

As it happens, the title "Bible" is a name not found in the Bible. Nowhere does the Bible name itself as a unit. Actually it is at least 66 separate writings which have been bound as one book. The earlier catalogue of contents that agrees with the present text dates from the fourth century. This indicates that the Bible has no internal claim of unity. Of course, the writings speak of other writings, scriptures and books but not as the unit of today's collection. Almost the last verse in the Bible commands that "nothing should be added to or subtracted from this book". While this has been quoted as a unifying statement, any Christian source will verify that the last book in the Bible was not the last book written. Thus the statement can only apply to this particular small book of the Bible's 66.

A MISSING CLAIM

Nowhere does the Bible sum itself up as totally God's word. However, the missionary argument proceeds this way. At 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says that all scripture is inspired of God. In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter says that Paul is correct because Paul too is a writer of scripture. Surely this is not supposed to convince anyone! "Paul says so and Peter says he is right." This kind of argument would not satisfy us if we were investigating any matter. Moreover, we have Paul's denial of his own total inspiration at 1 Corinthians 7:25. Here he states that he writes without God's inspiration on a subject.

About one third of the books in the Bible claim to be divine revelations while the others make no such comment. Because of this lack, the Fundamentalist type of Christian has tried to find other justification for maintaining his claim, as mentioned above.

AN ARTICLE OF FAITH

The Fundamentalist professes: "I believe the Bible to be totally inspired of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts." On the one hand, this is a statement of his belief, while on the other hand it is the basis of his belief: the first because this is said to be his conviction; the second, because the miraculous aspect of the Bible's inerrancy convinces him that God is the author. However, the statement cannot do either job. First, he believes that God ordered the writing of all the Bible. This must include 1 Corinthians 7:25 where Paul writes without the command of God - a contradiction. Second, the miraculous inerrancy of the Bible is something he has never seen. Many Biblical errors are excused as being copying errors. That is, the original manuscripts, which are lost forever, are said, to be inerrant but not those manuscripts which we have today. The statement (intended to serve as both an article of faith and the justification for such faith) fails because it is not universally applied in the first usage and it cites evidence which cannot be produced in the second usage.

Many of the verses in the Bible seem to contradict each other. However, these are often matters that can be reconciled by better understanding of translation and context. This kind of reconciliation is the subject of many Christian books and is a healthy process. But some have deceived themselves into thinking that this means every Biblical contradiction is only apparent and can be explained. Actually there is another category of contradictions which is not explainable by consideration of translation or context. It is the existence of this type of discrepancy that has caused the words "in the original manuscripts" to be added to any claim that the Bible is free of error. These are the so-called copying mistakes (e.g. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7). Here again the believer in total Bible inspiration neglects to apply his belief universally. At Isaiah 40:8, the Bible states that God's word stands forever - it does not get lost in the re-copying. If the Christian takes this part of the Bible as inspired how can he admit that other portions have not stood till now, let alone forever?

At this point the Christian redefines exactly what he means by God's word. He says that it is not so much the individual words of the Bible, these were chosen by the human writers, but the message which is God's word. So small statistical errors do not invalidate the Bible's totally divine authority. Once more we have an answer which opposes a previous claim: it was the supposed amazing accuracy of the individual words themselves that testified to the divine quality of the Bible. Now these words are said to be only human efforts under a more vague "in-breathing" (inspiration) of God.

WORDS AND MESSAGE

Jesus outlined a principle of reliability at Luke 16:10, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much: and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much." Now the missionary excuses small mistakes while maintaining that there are no big mistakes in the Bible. But Jesus' words do not allow for this separation of small and big errors. So the last Christian answer is used again: the missionary says that the message is one subject and it contains no errors big or small, but the actual words of the Bible might possibly contain error. Both the Muslim and the Christian should take note of this distinction. The Qur'an talks about the Injeel of Jesus, meaning the particular message he delivered. Both the missionary and the careless Muslim may believe that this Injeel is the same as the four gospels - the Biblical accounts of the life of Jesus. The Muslim should realize and the Christian should be ready to admit that the exact words of the four gospel accounts are not the same as the message of Jesus. The gospels narrate the events of his life and at times quote him. More correctly, the words of Jesus are paraphrased in the gospels. His sayings are recast but not directly quoted necessarily. In fact, the famous "Lord's Prayer" will be found in two different versions at Matthew 6 and Luke 11. In a similar way, the Qur'an mentions the Torah of Moses. Again, it must not be imagined that the message of Moses survives verbatim in today's Bible. A claim like this was made in the prophet Jeremiah's day, but we read: "How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us'? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie." (Jeremiah 8:8): In the following, we are concerned with the words of Jesus, not with the things people wrote about him. We do not pick and choose from the Bible according to what we like, but grant that the fundamentalist Christian likes all of the Bible. Therefore he should be willing to discuss any quotation made here, although the Muslim is not conceding any authenticity.

OUR METHOD

We intend to use the methods already illustrated to deal with the most basic issue between Christians and Muslims. The method has been to clarify what is vague, to expose neglected information, and to finish incomplete thoughts. This method enables us to turn to the words attributed to Jesus in the Bible and we can then determine where his words have been "overspecified" - made to say more than they mean - or where his words have been "twice sold" - given two interpretations.

OUR ISSUE

The primary issue is finally, not whether Jesus was divine, but whether he said that he was. Let us illustrate and then summarize the method of investigating the missionary's claim.

OVER-SPECIFICATION

In the overspecified category we have such passages as John Chapter 6, John 3:16 and the tenth chapter of John. At 6:41 Jesus says: "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." In this chapter, he compares himself to the manna eaten by the Israelites in Moses' time.

Quoting scripture he calls the manna "bread out of heaven", (Psalm 78:24). The vagueness in this argument is the fact that the Christian has not stated that he intends to make an exact parallel between Jesus and the manna: if one comes from heaven, so does the other. The information he has neglected involves the origin of the manna. Of course it was not prepared in heaven and then transported to earth. According to Numbers 11:9, it came from the same place as the dew. So a thought must be finished. If the Christian maintains that Jesus literally came out of the heaven where God lives, he forces a literal meaning from the words while allowing a figurative meaning for the same words in the case of the manna out of heaven.

John 3:16 is where the Christian says Jesus claimed status as not just a figurative son of God but as God's actual "only-begotten" son. Not all Bible translate the passage with this key word because some translators have seen the difficulty this causes. At Hebrews 11:17, the same Greek word is found in the original language. But in this place it refers to Isaac who was at no time, strictly speaking, Abraham's only-begotten son. In the case of Isaac the Church explains that "only-begotten" is not to be understood strictly but must be modified. However, no such modification is allowed in the case of John 3:16 when it is over-specified as being literally true. In the tenth chapter of John we read about the Jews trying to stone Jesus and saying that he had made himself equal to God. The Christian agrees with the Jews and overlooks Jesus' reply. He proceeds to tell them that their own scriptures refer to certain evil men as "gods". Therefore, he argued that it was even more appropriate that one actually sent by God should be called a "son of God". He had also said that it was appropriate to call a peacemaker a "son of God" (Matthew 5:9). The Jews and Christians overspecify his words when they insist that he has claimed divinity. There is another poorly conceived argument which is related to this. Where the Jews have understood Jesus to blaspheme - i.e. claim divine authority - the Christian says he has proof that Jesus did claim divinity. The incorrect assumption however, is that the Jews understood Jesus. For example, they understood him to seize divine authority when he told a man that his sins were forgiven (Mark 2). But the verse at John 12:49, among others, shows that Jesus denied any personal initiative. He spoke only what God commanded him to say.

THE MESSIAH

Still more badly thought through is an argument based on common Christian misunderstanding. Muslims agree that Jesus was "the Messiah". Although modern Bible translations hide the fact, many individuals are called "Messiah" in the Bible. Christians have come to believe that there is a connotation of divinity in the word, however. So when they read that Jesus admitted to being the Messiah and the Jewish High Priest declared it blasphemy, they feel that they have still more proof that Jesus claimed divinity. The High Priest could only protest what he thought was a lie - a slander against God. The Jews were awaiting the Messiah. Were they also ready to kill the first man who said that he was the Messiah because such a claim is blasphemous?

TWICE SOLD

In the "twice sold" category, we have verses like John 10:30 and 14:9. The first one reads: "I and the Father are one." The Christian leaves vague exactly what this sentence itself leaves vague: one what? The overlooked information is found in the Seventeenth Chapter of John where the same idea occurs more than once and includes the disciples of Jesus in this oneness. (See John 17:11, 21-22). The thought that should be finished is this: If Jesus meant to say that being "one" means being divine then are the disciples also divine in the same sense as Jesus since the same expression includes them? As it happens the phrase has been sold twice. The Seventeenth Chapter verses are quoted in support of unity of purpose while the Tenth Chapter verse is used to support the claim that Jesus announced his Godhood.

Many students of the Bible have an understanding of scriptures which is quite reasonable. However, these same students forget their interpretation at times and sell another one to the Muslim. They do not seem to notice this double standard. A clear illustration is the case of John 14:9. Ask where Jesus claimed divinity explicitly and one is most often shown this verse: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Clarification of the argument exhibits the difficulties. The Christian means to say that if one's eyes sees Jesus, they see God because Jesus is God. Even this clarification cannot be stated without trading on something left vague, namely, the Trinitarian distinction between Father and Son. Jesus said that seeing him was seeing the Father, yet Jesus is the Son. So they tell us: "read God for Father." In any case,

the argument is self-defeating. If seeing Jesus is seeing God (or the Father) because they are one and the same then how could Jesus tell people who were looking at him that they had never seen or heard God (the Father)? This is his statement in John 5:37!!! Now the Christian responds to a question which has not been asked! We have not said that John 14:9 is in conflict with 5:37 and asked for an explanation. But he proceeds to explain that the verses are in harmony because they refer to Jesus as one who reveals what God is like. People who did not receive Jesus did not "see" God. But our question is how the first interpretation of John 14:9 can be harmonized with John 5:37. They have provided a second interpretation for John 14:9 and yet the next time someone asks them to show a Bible passage where Jesus claims divinity, be sure that they will go to the first interpretation and quote this favorite verse: "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

THE STATUS OF THE BIBLE

In such discussions, several things should be noted. First, the Muslim does not have to reinterpret Christian scripture. Our duty is to insist that a man state his case clearly, not in vague terms. We must ask for all information related to the matter (Where else do we find key words and phrases in the Bible?). We must demand that thoughts expressed are carried to their logical conclusion. Let us illustrate again with another familiar example. An all-purpose quotation is John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through me." Exactly what this verse is supposed to prove is left vague. Does it prove the divinity of Jesus? Is it supposed to mean that God listens to no one except Jesus or those who call on Jesus ? If either of these ideas are to be based on the verse, we have to consider all the available information. The dictionary shows that the words "way", "truth", and "life" do not automatically carry connotations of divinity. So the Christian insists that the structure of the sentence stresses the way, the truth, and the life, as though Jesus is unique for all time. Bill Clinton may be the American President but he is not the first and probably not the last. So language usage alone does not do the job. Then another thought must be brought to its conclusion. "The life" is said to be a state of affairs: one either has "the life" or not. In this way the verse is used in support of the redeeming power of Jesus. Yet Jesus himself says: "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10). In this passage life is not a state of affairs, either positive or negative, with no other possible states. Jesus speaks here of something that can be measured. The verse John 14:6 is used by the missionary with the vaguest of intentions. Ironically enough, when his meaning is questioned, this verse becomes probably the most over-specified of all Bible texts.

NON-ISSUES

Second, there are certain non-issues that cannot be treated as though they were issues. Where the Christian and Muslim agree, there is no argument. For example: the Qur'an states that in spite of appearances the crucifixion of Jesus was unsuccessful, that God saved Jesus. The Christian says that Jesus died and three days later showed himself to be alive. Where the Christian exceeds his authority disagreement begins. He does not have proof that Jesus died. He has some anonymous writings (the Gospels) which say so. However, it was common belief in the first century among Christians that Jesus was not even crucified. But this was only one school of thought. Another is represented in the Bible and it has become the only Christian school of thought on the matter. The only facts that bear up well under historical examination are simply these: Jesus appeared to be crucified but was seen alive a few days later. Insisting that his death is proven is actually ludicrous. On the one hand we are told that this man healed cripples, lepers, the blind, and raised the dead. On the other hand, beating him,, stabbing him and nailing him to a cross is said to be quite sufficient to kill him. While portrayals of the crucifixion today tell of a great civic event, there are Bible references that indicate otherwise. A small gathering in a garden, where his followers were forced to stand at a distance is indicated in Luke 23:49 and John 19:41. The Bible describes his post-crucifixion appearances as an attempt to tell his disciples that in spite of what they had seen he was alive, not a ghost. If the Christian does not try to prove the death of Jesus and the Muslim does not try to prove his own theory of how Jesus avoided death, there is nothing left to disagree upon. This is precisely the point made in the Qur'an at 4:157.

ISSUES

Third, let us not be led into believing that certain issues can be treated as non-issues. More than one missionary has asked Muslims: "What do you gain by denying the divinity of Jesus?" The questioner hopes to evade an issue by treating it as unimportant. The answer to his

question was given by Jesus who said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Spelling out the precise disadvantages of belief in any particular falsehood is a worthwhile exercise, but the general principle of Jesus' words is sufficient motivation for rejection. The truth is, claiming divinity for Jesus is based on what people said about Jesus not on what Jesus himself said. Here is a place to explain the Muslim view of world religions. Islam is not a competitor among religions. The Qur'an states that in ancient times every nation had its messengers of God. Many peoples possessed the truth, but have to varying degrees added to this knowledge with unsupported claims. So the Muslim believes that virtually any of the old religions stripped of its excessive points any thoughtful person towards Islam.

CONSISTENCY

Fourth, the missionary must be consistent. If he admits that Jesus' words were expanded into Trinitarian doctrine by later generations, then he is either claiming that Jesus taught his disciples more than is actually recorded in the Bible, or he is saying that God brought us knowledge of the Trinity gradually. The first case cannot be reconciled with Jesus' words at John 18:20, ". . . I spoke nothing in secret." As for the second case, if the Trinity became known only to later generations, then one must not insist that Jesus preached the doctrine.

DEDUCTION

Fifth, deduction cannot increase content. Deduction is a process of seeing more clearly that which was already indicated by the evidence. We cannot deduce more than the evidence contains. This is why we say that the Trinity cannot be deduced from scripture. The definition of the Trinity requires a vocabulary not found on the lips of Jesus. At best, the Christian can point to a verse and say that it is in agreement with his ideas, but no verse is conclusive evidence of the divinity of Jesus. The so-called "fallacy of the converse" is the logical mistake most often made. This means turning the "arrow of implication" backward, e.g. rain means wet streets but wet streets do not mean rain. Another example: the appearance of the horizon on the ocean might be cited as being in harmony with the idea of a flat earth, but it certainly does not prove the earth to be flat. Similarly, some Bible statements might harmonize with the idea of a divine Jesus but no verse proves the claim.

THE NATURE OF PROOF

"Proof" is a very misused word. Proof refers to the establishment of a proposition. Proof withstands challenges and satisfies tests. But phrases such as "more proof", "better proof", or "stronger proof" are abuses of language or misunderstandings. "More proof" is a deceptive phrase that might lead us to believe that proof is measured and that people might have proofs of opposite things, but the winner is the one with more volume of proof. In this case proof has been confused with evidence. We may have another proof, but not more proof. When logicians speak of better proof, they are referring to something called elegance - a quality denoting clarity and simplicity. They do not refer to validity by this word. Proofs are either valid or invalid - or occasionally doubted by some until a more elegant version appears. The expression "stronger proof" describes not the proof but its assumptions. In general, the fewer the initial assumptions, the stronger the proof.

This brief explanation is intended to dispel the notion that proof depends on a man's ability to say a lot of things which sound plausible. It is content and quality, not appearance and quantity, that really matter. When the missionary produces his "proof" it can be shown to be unsatisfactory. He often concedes this fact but prefers the word "insufficient". He then claims that God can supply the insufficiencies. This raises three important points:

- 1) Proof is not the sort of thing that we can simply patch over the gaps with and then call it legitimate. In fact, any valid information contained in an unsatisfactory proof is unrelated to the conclusions that one has attempted to prove. For example, the apparent motion of the planets approximately fits the theory of epicycles which is part of the theory that puts the earth in the center of the universe. But the theory is false, which means the trajectories of the planets in no way support the idea that the earth stands stationary at the center of the universe.
- 2) When the Christian claims that God will "help one to believe" he argues in a small circle. His claim is based on his proof and his proof is based on his claim. The dialogue is something like this:

Christian: "I have proof."

Muslim: "But there are gaps in your argument."

Christian: "Ask God to help you believe."

Muslim: "Why should I?" (Claim based on proof.)

Christian: "Because of things I, have shown you."

Muslim: "But these things do not prove anything." (Proof based on claim.)

- 3) And finally, once again the Christian puts himself in a position where he must contradict his own behavior. When a preacher claims that he has proof for his beliefs, he should be talking about the kind of thing one man can give to another -the facts and arguments for his case. Instead, he admits that his belief is not built on evidence and analysis, but rests on the faith which God gave him! If faith is a gift from God then it is not something that one man can give another man. Missionary efforts would be more honest if it was stated that the Christian only intends to describe his religion and invite converts. But much of missionary literature suggests that Christian belief is built on the kind of evidence that could win a court case.

CHRISTIAN FAITH

Actually the Christian has two views of "faith". Faith is said to be a gift of God, but there is another thought he expresses when confronted as in the last paragraph. Speaking from personal experience: We tell a man that his evidence will not stand a thorough examination and he hurls an accusation that we are stubborn. As mentioned already, he carelessly interprets historical accuracy in the Bible as proof that it speaks only the truth on every matter. Turning the confusion backwards, he then says that if we doubt any passage in the Bible, we must doubt every book of history. But history is not our opponent. We are opposed to a particular doctrine built on the interpretation of a very small collection of quotations of Jesus. But before we can make this point, the second view of faith occurs to him. "If all things could be proven, where is the merit in believing?", he asks. In other words, he does not want final proof. He feels that a pledge of loyalty - a bold leap into belief is actually the act that brings salvation. So having faith means an effort that brings reward and yet faith is a gift from God that we do not deserve. Resolving this irony is the Christian's business. Our point here is only "honesty in advertising" If the foundations of Christianity are loyalty to the interpretation of scripture, it should not be advertised that Christianity stands on that which has been established in clarity - i.e. proven explicitly.

APPLICATION TO ISLAM

Of course one might ask if the points raised in this article cannot be applied to Islam. So in the same order as above, let us consider Islamic doctrine and the status of the Qur'an subjected to similar arguments.

What could be identified as theology in Islam contains no contradictory mysteries for the simple reason that the Qur'an reveals God by revealing His attributes and His will. That is, descriptions of God and worship given to God are due to Him because of His position as God. There is no incarnation doctrine leading to the combination of Godly and un-Godly attributes in one individual. Islam does not ask one to believe in anything outside of reason. The resurrection of the dead, for example, is no more than today's researchers in biology have considered. Soviet scientists once reproducing an extinct species of elephant by the use of a microscopic unit of long dead gene material. A subtle point is found in the precise grammar of the Qur'an's description of God's power. We do not read: "With God all things are possible." More correctly, we read instead: "Over all things, God has power." These things are the things He created. These things include good and evil since these words are relative descriptions. For example, the good of the vulture is good for the vulture, but evil for a man. This is the contrast in Islam between Good and Evil: beneficial versus harmful. All things originate with God including the rules which bring harm on the evildoer. So it is that the Qur'an states that God rewards, but wrong done brings harm on the doer in the settling of accounts.

The Qur'an does not present us with mysteries of faith. Instead it is a guide. Left to ourselves we could not reproduce its contents because our research is largely trial and error. The error would prove disastrous - before we accomplished the project. So while the Qur'an is beyond reasoning, it is not beyond reason - given the guidance, we can verify its truthfulness.

ORIGIN OF THE QUR'AN

Several times the Qur'an announces itself as a sufficient sign (e.g. 29:49). Although the Muslims of Muhammad's time were a persecuted minority, their opposers never answered the challenge of the Qur'an, as it says: "And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to our servant, then produce a chapter like it. And call your witnesses or helpers besides God if you are correct." (Qur'an 2:23).

PRESERVATION OF THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an promises its own preservation (15:9). It mentions itself by name about seventy times. The Arabic word "Qur'an" means "recitation". Reciting the Qur'an is part of a Muslim's daily prayer. In addition to careful writing of copies, there has always been this double checking of its contents. Gather any small number of sincere Muslims together and it is possible to repeat the Qur'an from their collected memories. Some centuries ago an aberrant group claimed that there was more to the Qur'an than now available. Their embarrassment has been the fact that even in this century there are copies of the Qur'an that date from centuries before the time of this controversy. Recently a prominent missionary dishonestly challenged the authenticity of Qur'anic manuscripts. He claimed that twenty different people, governments or institutions claim to possess the oldest copy of the Qur'an. The thought he wants his audience to finish is that there are twenty versions of the Qur'an. The truth is, all the ancient copies agree letter for letter with today's text. Which one happens to be the oldest is irrelevant to considerations of authenticity.

WORDS AND MESSAGE

The very words of the Qur'an are the message of the Qur'an. The speaker is God, not His spokesman recasting matters in his own words. Islam was not founded by Muhammad. God's message was given by prophets in every nation since at least the time of Adam. The particular religious observances of Islam and use of the term Muslim were well known in the time of Abraham. (See the Qur'an at 22:78; 2:135; 3:67-68; 16:123.) While the Prophet Muhammad is said to be a good example for us (33:21) the same is said of Abraham, word for word, at 60:4. The vital point here is that Islam is not the cult following of a man. Muhammad himself was told to make all his judgments by referring to the Qur'an (5:48-51). The Prophet was also told to ask for forgiveness, especially when he knew his death was approaching, for it is God alone that must be called on and asked for forgiveness (Chapter 110 and 40:12). The Prophet himself was corrected by admonitions in the Qur'an (e.g. Chapter 80).

THE CHRISTIAN CHARGE

In spite of an abundance of such considerations that show the Qur'an and the practices of Islam as something separate from the man Muhammad, the Christian insists that the Qur'an was his own invention. They simultaneously maintain that he was a forger and a psychotic - that he deceived and was deceived on the same issue. They say that he lied about being a prophet and yet they say that he himself believed that he was a prophet! Of course, a man cannot be both true and false to himself regarding precisely the same point: If he believes he is a prophet, he does not fool people into believing him. The Qur'an itself denounces forgery (10:15-18).

TWO HYPOTHESES

The Christian difficulty is that they need both hypotheses: the forger and the psychotic, to begin to explain the existence of the Qur'an. They need to name the Prophet as a forger because he had an outside source. For example, the Qur'an recites material unknown to the Arabs and yet recognized as correct by a learned Israelite in the Prophet's time (11:49; 10:94; 26:197). They need to name the Prophet as a psychotic because he obviously was moved to behave as though he was a prophet. For example, against everyone's better judgment, the Qur'an announces the behavior of Muhammad's worst enemy - Abu Lahab. This man used to contradict every item of Islam, but in ten years never seized the chance to contradict the Qur'an's contents (Chapter 111). Until now there are similar statements in the Qur'an; the

very instructions are given to those who wish to demolish the Qur'an; e.g. 5:82 tells Jews how to prove the Qur'an false.

A THIRD HYPOTHESIS

As a last resort, there is a third hypothesis made by the missionary. Given an outside source for the Qur'an and Muhammad's sincerity, they suggest that he was deceived by Satan. The missionary steps deeper into difficulty with this suggestion. The Qur'an itself tells us that we should seek refuge in God from Satan before reading the Qur'an (16:98). Satan has undone himself here, if he is the author. (Compare Jesus' words at Mark 3:26). In any case, the biggest complaint against mankind voiced in the Qur'an is his unsupported claims "let them produce their proof" is the repeated admonition. A direct challenge regarding this last hypothesis is found at 4:82: "Have they not carefully considered the Qur'an? If it came from other than God, surely they would have found in it many inconsistencies."

ACCURACY OF THE QUR'AN

Now the Muslim would not consider using as an excuse that some of the Qur'an has been lost in recopying. He will only insist that the Qur'an is the Arabic text and not a translation. The Arabic text is complete. A small effort has been made to produce contradictions in the Qur'an. The points made are fatuous. We have to wonder about the mental capability or the honesty of those who have brought forward these items. Some examples follow:

- The Bible reports that the Jews sarcastically addressed Jesus as "Messiah" (or the Greek equivalent "Christ") at the crucifixion (Mark Chapter 15). Despite this, one Toronto group of missionaries has insisted that a Jew would never do this and so the Qur'an must be in error at 4:157!!!
- The Qur'an commands that a man provide equally for each wife should he marry more than one. An active religious propaganda center in Rochester, New York, claims that this contradicts the fact that a man is restricted to four wives at most. They have mistaken the contrapuntal for the contradictory.
- Another common challenge is that the Qur'an states that God does not guide the wrongdoers. This is said to contradict the statement that God guides whom He pleases (28:50; 35:8). Actually the verses are complimentary, telling us that God chooses not to guide the wrongdoers.

MUSLIM MISUNDERSTANDING?

Related to this kind of thing we have the charge made that the Qur'an does not have an understanding of Christianity. As it happens, the Qur'an denounces many beliefs which are considered heretical by Christians. Instead of rejoicing that Muslims reject the same heresies as Christians, the missionary insists that Muslims have been given only a misunderstanding of Christianity. This claim can only be made by deliberate hiding or careless ignoring of the facts. The Qur'an deals in detail with the most precise points of Christian doctrine.

ABROGATION?

Still another misunderstanding concerns the so-called doctrine of abrogation. At: 16:10, "And when We change any Ayah for an Ayah - and God knows best what He reveals - they say: 'You are only a forger'. Nay, most of them know not." The word Ayah here can mean sign, message, or verse. So it is that many Christians have imagined that some verses of the Qur'an were changed. Some Muslims seem to agree when they say that some verses cancel other verses. Their difficulty is with language. The Christians misunderstand (or misinterpret) the word cancel (actually the Arabic word "naskh"). For example, the Qur'an commands one not to pray when drunk. Since the Qur'an was revealed gradually over a period of twenty three years, a later verse forbade intoxicants. But this later verse does not cancel the earlier one. Compare restricted drug laws in most countries: There are laws giving penalties for possession, but other laws penalizing those who sell these drugs. Yet the first kind of law does not cancel the second kind. The missionary trades on this misunderstanding, hoping to cause confusion. However, he seizes the opportunity too quickly. All charges of abrogation are said to apply to legal matters. However the verse of 16:101 refers to something that had already happened. Yet this verse was revealed in Mecca. All verses relating to legal matters were revealed later in Medina. There is no inconsistency in the Qur'an - remember, this is the claim of 4:82.

The best explanation of the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. The clarification of 16:101 is found at 2:106. Here the same thought is expressed but this time the context shows that the Jews were being addressed. The word Ayah refers then to previous messages of the prophets. In particular, some of the Jewish Law was supplanted by the Qur'an. (Compare the words of Jesus reported in the Qur'an at 3:49.)

INTERPRETATION

We discussed interpretation of the Bible. Is the Qur'an subject to misinterpretation? Certainly it is, and for the same reason that the Bible is - namely, the isolating of certain passages from those verses which explain them. Our point was not that the misinterpretation of the Bible was to be blamed on the Bible itself. Rather, the origin of the problem is the carelessness of men.

THE CONCLUDING POINTS

In the preceding section, the first three points have already been addressed to both Christians and Muslims. The fourth and the fifth may be dealt with by simply mentioning two points. First, the only "evolved" item in Islam is judicial decision. New circumstances bring new problems which must be ruled upon by the original principles. This is a body of knowledge that grows. Second, the most intelligent of Muslim scholars have always been ready to admit where they have crossed over into speculation. No mental consideration has ever led to the widespread acceptance of a theological doctrine which was unknown to the Muslims of Muhammad's time.

THE GOOD NEWS OF ISLAM

Finally, the Muslim really has something that one man can give to another: the Qur'an. This Book speaks to each reader asking him to consider the things that every man must admit. The reader is asked to arrange this collection of facts into a coherent whole and think on it. By reminding us of facts the Qur'an makes contact with reality as the Bible does. But the key difference in Christian and Muslim thought appears in the next step. The facts are not simply a feature of the Qur'an. The things we come to believe in are directly based on these facts, deduced from them in the legitimate sense of the word. The good news of Islam is that a man who loves truth, detests falsehood, and fears only God has moved toward Islam and thus ultimate success.